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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY REPORT - August 03, 2005

1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk over the past week.

Human Rights

12. Statkevich Begins Sentence

On July 29, opposition politician Nikolai Statkevich arrived in Baranovichi to serve his two-year restricted freedom sentence for staging unauthorized demonstrations. Authorities moved Statkevich to Baranovichi from Krupki so that his ill father could easily visit him. Statkevich will live in prison barracks, work ironing clothes, and report to the local administration at an appointed time each day. Authorities banned Statkevich from working for a private company, claiming he had to work for a state-owned enterprise, although there is no law to support this. The authorities reportedly offered to reduce his sentence if he would abstain from political activities, but Statkevich refused.

13. Partial Victory

On July 29, Gomel's Central District Court ruled in favor of opposition activist Maria Bogdanovich and ordered the Gomel Regional Local History Museum to pay her two months' back wages. The museum fired Bogdanovich in May for "repeated failure to carry out her labor contract duties without valid reason", but Bogdanovich claimed it was due to her political activities. The Court, noting an "unsound psychological climate" at the museum, ordered the administration to pay the wage arrears and change the wording on Bogdanovich's record to "dismissal by mutual consent".

14. Activists Detained

On July 30, police in Dokshitsy briefly detained Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) leader Vintsuk Vyachorka and party member Aleksey Kovalets for alleged distribution of newspapers and bulletins. According to Vyachorka, the police ransacked their car and seized copies of the registered newspapers Salidarnasts, Zhoda, and the BPF's bulletin. The activists were released and not charged.

15. A Sanctioned Punch

On July 31, the Prosecutor's Office dismissed Svetlana Zavadskaya's request to initiate criminal proceedings against an OMON guard who punched her during a July 7 demonstration marking the fifth anniversary of her husband's disappearance. Police and the Prosecutor's

Office found no ground for a criminal case, siding with the OMON officer in question, who said he was merely trying to calm Zavadskaya after she had hit him. Zavadskaya plans to appeal the decision. On August 1, the OMON peacefully dispersed a demonstration in support of Zavadskaya.

16. Independent Paper Fined

On July 26, independent daily Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta (BDG) announced that tax authorities had fined BDG USD 21,700 in penalties for alleged irregularities in tax payments. BDG claimed its accountants strictly followed the Finance Ministry's guidelines and that the fines were the authorities' attempt to force the paper's closure using economic pressure.

Economics

17. Executives Charged

On August 1, Brest Regional Prosecutor's Office charged top executives of two animal feed plants with overstating output figures in statistical reports. The director of Beryoza Animal Feed Plant allegedly undercharged a the company bakery, costing the plant USD 4,179, and bought Ukrainian corn at a higher price than offered by a Belarusian company, resulting in USD 17,241 in losses.

Anti-US

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18. US Money Helps Opposition

On July 31, "journalist" Ruslan Poddubski on the state television channel ONT reported that opposition politicians are surviving off money from the US. Poddubski accused United Civic Party leader Anatoly Lebedko of not working because the US Embassy pays him USD 1,500 monthly in living expenses. According to Poddubski, the West knowingly violates international laws against allocating money for political needs by helping Belarus' opposition.

19. Americans Spread Conflict

On July 31, Gleb Volkov's article in the military newspaper Vo Slavu Rodiny accused Americans of spreading danger, not democracy. According to Volkov, the USG's policy is to pit pro-American regimes against other countries in the region. He cited the use of Egypt and Saudi Arabia against the Iraqi regime and warned that the U.S.'s behavior would only increase radical Islamic movements and terrorism.

Relations with Poland

10. Sister Cities Conflict

On July 29, city authorities in Wroclaw and Lublin, Poland, withdrew sister city agreements with Grodno and Brest, respectively, in response to the GOB's persecution of the Union of Belarusian Poles (UBP). Wroclaw authorities claimed the decision would not affect Grodno residents and announced that 40 Grodno children would still visit Wroclaw for an August holiday. Lublin authorities cancelled a visit to Brest and vowed not to resume ties until Belarus-Poland

relations normalized. According to counselor at the Belarusian Embassy in Warsaw Tadeusz Struzhetsky, more than 60 Belarusian cities, districts and regions continue to maintain ties with 80 cities, districts and regions in Poland.

¶11. Poles Go to Prison

On August 2, police arrested Tadeusz Gawin, the first chairman of the UBP, and deputy head of the UBP Wieslaw Kiewlak, sentencing them both to 15 days in jail for participating in an unauthorized demonstration. Over 100 people attended the August 1 demonstration at the House of Poles in Grodno, including the vice president of Poland's Sejm, Donald Tusk. Gawin criticized the GOB's decision not to recognize the March UBP convention and to force a new, government-controlled convention on August 27. He called on UBP members to support Andzhelika Boris and the UBP leadership elected in March.

Miscellaneous

¶12. Radiation Reduction

On July 28, the Cooperation for Rehabilitation (CORE) program announced that it has helped reduce the maximum radiation intake levels among residents tenfold in the Chernobyl-hit Bragin district. However, the average radiation dose in the district remained at 30 Becquerel per kilogram. The project examined 8,000 residents over two years with Human Radiation Meters (HRM) installed at the district's two Radiation Control Centers (RCC). Several children were diagnosed with high radiation doses. CORE hopes to open two new RCCs, install an HRM at the district hospital, and launch a mobile HRM.

¶13. New Modeling Rules

On July 29, Prime Minister Sergey Sidorsky signed a resolution on a new set of license regulations for modeling agencies in accordance with the March presidential decree on preventing trafficking in persons. Under the new regulations, 80 percent of agency staff must have degrees in pedagogy, healthcare, physical culture, tourism, art or design. This also includes hairdressers, manicurists and stylists who must have at least five years' professional experience. Agencies must have a set curriculum and program of studies for each discipline, specialized educational

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facilities and workshops.

Quote of the Week

¶14. On August 3, Interior Minister Lieutenant-General Vladimir Naumov outlined the ideal behavior of police officers.

"Police must use polite means to beat confessions out of criminals. A polite and considerate police officer can succeed in persuading a criminal to confess. [Unfortunately] There are still police officers swearing like troopers."

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